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ABSTRACT

In the experimental project reported, the U. S. Office of Economic Opportunity delegated its resources to the Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs for the purpose of comparing public and private sector approaches to social planning in rural areas. A private agency, Community Services of Pennsylvania, was designated by the Department of Community Affairs to supervise the work of Rural Planning Specialists, one in each of two rural Pennsylvania counties. Two other Rural Planning Specialists were placed by the Department of Community Affaris with publicity controlled Planning Commissions in two other rural areas. Through a series of program analyses involving interviews with the four Rural Planning Specialists, their supervisors, and community leaders and chronological event analyses carried on over a period of nearly two years, preliminary conclusions are: (1) the introduction of nongovernmental social planners into rural areas can be accomplished in approximately six months less time than introducing the same social role through a public agency; (2) the selection of personnel for private planning role is more critical to program effectiveness than in a more highly structured public project; and (3) the review of proposed community development projects by nongovernmental social planners, while inhibited by their lack of formal structural ties with the public Planning Commissions, is possible through the establishment of informal relationships within the rural community setting. (Author/DB)

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Nongovernmental Social Planning in Rural Areas of the United States

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Introduction. Social planning although not new to the United States in the 1930's underwent a significant series of transformations as the Nation coped with the special problems presented by the Great Depression.[1] These changes were encompassed in the dramatic expansion of governmental activity in programs of land retirement, population resettlement, child welfare, public health, unemployment insurance, employment assurance, old-age pensions and public assistance. (Kolb and Brunner, 1952:437-438)

How did this expansion represent change? First, the importance of government was sharply increased relative to the private sector. In 1933 alone, the federal government spent over 300 million dollars on these programs, thus assuming major responsibility for setting the directions of social planning in the United States.

Second, the content of social welfare programs was changed by government's wholesale entry into social planning. That is, rather than following the lead of private agencies and individuals in "giving comfort to the unfortunate and outcasts of the society" through settlement houses, clinics and homes, the public effort was directed at population resettlement and income maintenance. For example, the Social Security Act of 1935 placed special emphasis on monetary support for children and the elderly as well as services.

More recently, President Johnson's War on Poverty reinforced the role of government and the public sector in social planning. The wave of social legislation passed by the United States Congress in the five years from 1963 to 1968 included action on civil rights, manpower development, community services and citizen involvement in planning. There have been critics, however, of this public effort in the social realm (Alinsky, 1965;

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[1] Social planning emerged as a strong force in American society shortly after the Civil War (circa 1870). As such it was concentrated in the private sector with individuals and religious groups taking the dominant roles in providing direction to such activities as orphan asylums, public-hygiene programs and settlement houses. The emergence of a social gospel in religious institutions during the late 1800's served to further solidify the role of the established churches in social planning. The emphasis in the private sector remained on shelters, clinics, playgrounds and food distribution. The activities of the Salvation Army, introduced to the United States from England in 1880, epitomize the social planning role of the private institution in the late 1800's and early 1900's. For an excellent descriptive treatment of this phenomenon see Blake McKelvy's volume, The Urbanization of America, especially Chapter 10, "From Charity to Community Welfare," and Chapter 11, "The Emergence of the Social Gospel." The larger planning movement in the United States, with emphasis on physical planning, received its initial support from metropolitan government during the 1920's.

Howe and Lamer, 1968; Manis, 1967; Moyhihan, 1965, 1967, 1969; Sundquist, 1969). One consequence of this criticism has been an increase in the efforts to find alternative means of improving the quality of life in rural and urban areas through both social and physical planning.

In 1970, the United States Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) contracted with the Pennsylvania State Department of Community Affairs (PaDCA) to establish an experiment in social planning for rural communities. To facilitate a comparative analysis, two approaches were used to introduce social planning into selected rural areas. The first approach utilized existing governmentally-controlled physical planning organizations while the second method was independent of state and local government direction. The means chosen for implementing the experiment was a new social role entitled, "Rural Planning Specialist" (RPS). Table 1 summarizes data indicating that there were two approaches and two Rural Planning Specialists (RPSs) employed under each.

TABLE 1 HERE

The explicit goals for all four of the RPSs were the same. Their efforts were aimed to stimulate "the indigenous community to use its own resources - human and financial - to identify needs and provide solutions to these needs, especially in the areas of health and welfare" (Berman, et al., 1970:10-12; Thomson, 1971).

More specific explication of the project's objectives resulted in the following five areas of work common to all RPSs: (Thomson, 1970)

1. To identify and evaluate existing social services and potential health and welfare needs, especially among those individuals who presently are benefiting least from the existing services.

2. To establish priorities among the unmet human needs in a project area - identifying the problems underlying the need and what changes are to occur.

3. To develop the operational procedures among cooperating agencies - governmental or private - to integrate the agencies and resources needed to service the designated priorities especially health and welfare needs established in each project region.

4. To develop the means by which the local project area can provide and/or expand the designated health and welfare services needed to help people achieve a better quality of life, both physically and economically so that such services can become integrated into the community's continuing services. Such development could include:

   -improving general conditions of health and welfare
   -improving occupational abilities
   -expanding local decision-making
   -increasing the indigenous leadership
   -increasing the available funding/resources

Table 1. Method of Social Planning and Location of Field Personnel[a]

Method of Planning	Location of Field Personnel in Pennsylvania, USA	
Private Sector (Employer: Community Services of Pennsylvania, a privately funded social welfare agency)	Northumberland County Appointed: 15 October 70	Wayne County Appointed: 15 January 71
Public Sector (Employer: Planning Commissions, publicly funded organizations under the direction of County government within the legislative limits of the State)	Northern Tier Regional Planning and Development Commission Bradford, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga and Wyoming counties Appointed: 23 August 71	Union-Snyder Regional Planning Commission Union and Snyder counties Appointed: 1 May 71

[a]In addition to these personnel, others with responsibility for the experimental project were: (1) Project Coordinator, Bureau of Human Resources, PaDCA; (2) Project Supervisor, Community Services of Pennsylvania (CSP); (3) the Executive Directors of the Northern Tier Regional Planning and Development Commission and the Union-Snyder Regional Planning Commission and (4) the authors of this paper as Evaluation Director and Coordinator, respectively.

-increasing the institutional services available
-improving inter-organizational cooperation
-increasing intra-department communication

5. To ascertain whether a Rural Planning Specialist can, in conjunction with local, independent and governmental support, improve and expand the health and welfare services available to the designated public and increase the indigenous leadership among both the professional staff and recipients in decision-making concerning social issues.

The difference between the two pairs of RPSs was not therefore, primarily in aims but in style of operation. The two RPSs working under private auspices were free to contact individuals and organizations, both public and private, as they found most expedient. In contrast, the two other RPSs, working under the direct supervision of the physical Planning Commissions, did not have this freedom; they were representatives of these organizations. Also, since the Commissions had an established organizational constituency the RPSs were expected, at least in making initial community contacts, to interact with this constituency.

In summary, the historical trend toward increasing public involvement in social planning in the United States led to an increase in criticism of the means used by government. One consequence of this criticism was a more energetic search for alternative methods of social planning. As part of this search an experiment incorporating both public and private sector involvement has been underway for nearly two years in Pennsylvania with two persons working the private sector and two others working under public auspices.

Methodology. Given the historical setting and project design explicated above, the project evaluators chose a range of data gathering methods. First, as an observer, an evaluator attended meetings at which time the project was introduced to the community. These observational data provided estimates of community support and interest in the project as well as names of proponents and opponents who might be interviewed after the project was underway. Second, continuous contact was maintained between an evaluator and the four RPSs in order to build a series of chronological event analyses. These analyses not only contained information about the RPSs' style of operation but also revealed aspects of the communities' social structures. Finally, an evaluator interviewed the RPSs' supervisors and leaders from the communities in which the RPSs were working.

Analysis and discussion. This analysis focuses on three areas of concern in social planning; namely, the introduction of the planner to the community, the selection of planning personnel, and the planner's review of community development projects.

Introduction to the Community

In this project, the process of introduction to the community was done in two fundamentally different ways. For social planning in the private sector, a meeting of community leaders and representatives of human service

agencies in the county was called by Community Services of Pennsylvania (CSP). At this session, opportunities offered by this project were explained and appeals were made for cooperation with the RPS. Formal approval was not sought from either agency representatives or community leaders. Strong efforts were made, however, to achieve among these people a working consensus that the presence of the RPS would be desirable.

In contrast, the social planners in the public sector were introduced through planning commissions. The approval of an organized governmental body was sought in these two cases.

It was necessary to make a presentation of the project's purpose and procedures and advantages of cooperation at one of the Commission's regular monthly meetings. Following debate, each of the Commissions acted at this same meeting to formally approve participation in the project. However, after this instance of prompt decision-making, additional time was spent by the Commissions either clarifying the Project's scope and implications or developing a program of work for the RPS. Then, in the style of formally organized bureaucracies, contracts were drawn, modified by both parties, eventually signed and delivered. Only after this procedure were the Executive Directors of the Planning Commissions empowered to officially begin personnel recruitment. The results of these introductory activities are reflected in the appointment dates of the RPSs (See Table 1). The smallest gap between private and public appointments is 3 1/2 months; the largest, 10 months.

It would appear from these data that any social planning program that requires rapid introduction of personnel into rural settings should eschew an approach that requires immediate approval by local public organizations. The experience of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program of the Pennsylvania Cooperative Extension Service also supports this conclusion. This federally-funded program (Synectics, 1971), operated by The Pennsylvania State University, employs field personnel to work in communities across the state. Their introduction into the community, which took place rapidly, was through an extra-community agency, the University's Cooperative Extension Service, rather than a locally controlled organization. In both the privately controlled Rural Planning Specialist Project and the publicly supervised Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program initial local support in terms of cooperation was sought but no immediate formal organizational approval from the public sector was required. Taking into consideration long term effectiveness in a rural area, one might suggest that subsequent to successful introduction of a social planning function, perhaps taking a period of two to four years, that this formal approval be sought as an additional source of legitimation in the community.

Selection of Personnel

A second area of concern in social planning is the selection of personnel. In the Rural Planning Specialist Project, the two different methods chosen for introducing social planning into rural areas constituted role definitions that were dissimilar. On one hand, the public sector RPS worked

within the already established framework of expectations of the Planning Commission and its Executive Director. Further, the public RPS's role performance was highly visible to his immediate supervisor; a role characteristic likely to lead to conformity to the supervisor's expectations.

On the other hand, the private sector RPS worked within only a loose consensus of acceptance among individuals and agency personnel in the community. Expectations were highly unstructured and supervision was provided by a CSP staff member located at the geographically distant CSP headquarters. Therefore, not only were the role expectations vague when the private sector RPS was appointed, but the visibility of the RPS's role performance to his supervisor was low. These role characteristics are likely to lead to innovative role definitions and, thus, potentially to behavior that may be defined as deviant by the supervisor.

From the point of view of matching personnel to role expectations, an administrator clearly would wish to place in the private sector positions, persons that have a high tolerance for ambiguity, an ability to actively seek out unmet needs related to social planning in the community and an acute sensitivity to their physically distant supervisor's expectations. Alternatively, although the persons in the public sector positions might benefit from having this somewhat uncommon set of characteristics, the more explicity and specific role expectations and the supervisor's immediate availability make these abilities less essential to adequate role performance.

The experience of the Rural Planning Specialist Project, while far from conclusive with only four cases, is suggestive with regard to personnel selection. The two individuals appointed in the private sector varied considerably in their possession of the characteristics outline above. Subsequent role performance during the first year of the project revealed a higher level of effectiveness for the RPS with the abilities which most closely matched the role expectations than for the other RPS. It is significant to note, however, in the second year of the Project that from the perspective of the supervisor the gap between the performance of these two RPSs has noticeably narrowed. Although no quantitative empirical data were available to confirm the conclusion, the evaluators speculated that this perceived narrowing may have been the result of increasing specificity of role expectations and closer supervision by the CSP staff member.

Experience with the public sector appointments has been mixed as judged by the RPS's immediate supervisors, the Planning Commission Executive Directors. In one situation where role expectations were explicit and specific and a high co-orientation on these expectations existed among the Planning Commission, the Executive Director and the RPS, the RPS's performance has been positively evaluated. In contrast, in the other Planning Commission situation, concensus on role expectations was relatively low between the Executive Director and the RPS. Thus, subsequent performance by the RPS, while evaluated as contributing to the general aims of the project by the outside evaluators, was perceived as limited by the RPS's supervisor.

It is appropriate to conclude from the analysis of these data that, while personnel selection is always important for any position, it is especially

significant for the private sector social planning positions when structured as in the Rural Planning Specialist Project. Further, the structure of role expectations and the visibility of the role performance may be essential aspects to be considered in social planning project design if the level of control over personnel selection is uncertain.

Review of Community Development Projects

Finally, a third area of concern for social planning is the review of community development projects by the social planner. The purpose of such review is to identify latent consequences of the projects, both favorable and unfavorable in the sense of social well-being. Further, early review by a social planner may result in project modification in order to incorporate features that increase the well-being of a broader spectrum of the community residents. For example, in the construction of housing for the elderly, a social planner might see the opportunity to involve underemployed residents in manpower training programs to make them more fully employable, thus resulting not only in housing but a better standard of living for those who assisted in its construction.[2]

Access to such planning activity for community development projects is conditioned by at least three variables. First, in the context of the United States, and especially Pennsylvania, most projects of significant magnitude must be examined and approved by some kind of planning body that is responsible for land use of physical development. In fact, this review process is mandatory for projects receiving federal financial assistance.

Second, the planning organizations mentioned above vary widely in terms of two characteristics: level of professional staffing and planning commission members' knowledge of planning. While some of these public planning organizations have a number of well educated and experienced staff, other organizations have limited staff, depending to a considerable extent on consultants for their planning services. Given the control structure of public planning commissions,[3] it is possible to have lay Commissioners who

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[2]The authors are indebted to Charles Berman formerly with PaDCA for this illustration.

[3]The control structure typically involves a board of directors. Members of this body are called Planning Commissioners. They may employ within the limits of their financial resources a planning staff and consultants. In practice, a knowledge of planning is not a prerequisite to appointment as a Commissioner; rather, a willingness to serve in this voluntary post combined with an expressed interest in the well-being of the community are more common criteria for appointment. These lay Commissioners have the power to set policy for the Planning Commission and direct its work through their employee, the Executive Director or Planner-in-Charge.

have little, if any, knowledge of the planning process directing the activities of the Planning Commission. This comment should not be misinterpreted to mean that all members of all Commissions are uninformed, the intent here is to emphasize the range of knowledge from unimformed to fully informed on the part of lay Planning Commissioners.

Third, the identity of the person seeking access to the planning process is worthy of note. Particularly in rural areas where information is frequently communicated on a face-to-face basis among acquaintances, this matter of personal acceptability to others and perceived legitimacy of concern in local residents' eyes is significant.

The three variables influencing access to planning activity for community development projects are, therefore, (1) membership as staff or lay commissioners on a planning commission (2) the characteristics of planning staff and lay commissioners as they condition the commission's potential for role specialization and breadth of planning expectations, and (3) the personal identity of the individual seeking access.

In the Rural Planning Specialist Project, the public RPSs have structural access to community development project review by virtue of their employment by the Planning Commissions. The private sector RPSs do not have this relationship. While data on the activities of the four RPSs indicate a rather uniformly low level of involvement in community development project review, two interesting patterns have emerged. In the case of one public RPS, the lack of consensus between the RPS and the Planning Commission's Executive Director over the RPS's role led the RPS to abandon participation in the review process. That is, although one social structural characteristic of the situation favored access, another such characteristic of a negative nature served to neutralize the opportunity for access. In this instance, interestingly enough, the need for a social input to the review activity was recognized[4] and provided by another member of the Commission's staff who was partially oriented to social planning.[5]

The second situation of special merit is a private sector RPS. Through a series of effective efforts in stimulating the community to improve the quality and quantity of social services, this RPS established sufficient personal legitimacy to gain access to the larger decision-making processes of the community. Thus in the absence of a formal structural tie to a planning commission, this RPS established a means to make review inputs to community development projects apart from their formal review by a public planning agency.

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[4] In this case the five-county Planning Commission has a number of long-term members who have built up considerable expertise in the planning process. Thus, their experience combined with the structural inclusion of elected governmental officials on the Commission increase their sensitivity to the social aspects of planning (variable number 2).

[5] The staff of this Planning Commission is relatively large for a rural area, including 22 professional and support personnel. In this setting, specialization is possible to the extent that one or more staff may have responsibilities in the social planning arena (variable number 2).

From the analysis of these data, it may be concluded that although structural access to the public review process for community development projects may be a facilitating element in the prediction of overall access, it is clearly not the only element involved. While the nongovernmental RPSs may lack this formal structural tie, it is possible to establish informal relationships to circumvent this obstacle. Further, the presence of structural access may be a facilitating factor only when other conditions are met one of which is recognition by the Commission's Executive Director or the Commission itself of the need for a social planning input.

Summary. Social planning in the United States has been predominantly in the hands of state and federal governmental agencies since the Great Depression. The efficacy of such an allocation to the public sector of society has recently come under criticism. In the experimental project reported in this paper, the U. S. Office of Economic Opportunity has delegated its resources to the Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs for the purpose of comparing public and private sector approaches to social planning in rural areas. The Department of Community Affairs designated a private agency, Community Services of Pennsylvania, to supervise the work of Rural Planning Specialists, one in each of two rural Pennsylvania counties. Two other Rural Planning Specialists were placed by the Department of Community Affairs with publicly controlled Planning Commissions in two other rural areas. Through a series of program analyses involving interviews with the four Rural Planning Specialists, their supervisors, and community leaders and chronological event analyses carried on over a period of nearly two years, preliminary conclusions are (1) the introduction of nongovernmental social planners into rural areas can be accomplished in approximately six months less time than introducing the same social role through a public agency; (2) the selection of personnel for private planning role is more critical to program effectiveness than in a more highly structured public project; and (3) the review of proposed community development projects by nongovernmental social planners, while inhibited by their lack of formal structural ties with the public Planning Commissions, is possible through the establishment of informal relationships within the rural community setting.

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